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Report on recent developments in agricultural statistics and future plans prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on recent developments in agricultural statistics and future plans. The Commission may wish to review overall progress, current activities and future development plans in agricultural statistics.

* E/CN.3/2003/1.
** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 4* (E/2002/24), para. 1.

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Recent developments in agricultural statistics and future plans

Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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I. Medium-term plan for the period 2004-2009

1. The medium-term plan for the period 2004-2009 for subprogramme items 2.2.2, Food and agricultural information, 2.3.1, Fisheries information and 2.4.4, Forestry information and liaison, was submitted to the one hundred and twenty-third session of the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), held from 28 October to 2 November 2002.[1] Summary details of those subprogrammes are contained in the annex.

2. The Council endorsed the substantive content of the medium-term plan for the period 2004-2009 and recognized that the medium-term plan was responsive to key international events, such as the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha Ministerial Conference, the International Conference on Financing for Development, the five-year review of the World Food Summit and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

II. Review of statistical activities

3. A review of statistical activities in FAO was undertaken by the FAO Programme, Budget and Evaluation Division (PBE) in 2002, and included an external peer review panel. The preliminary conclusions of the review included recommendations that:

- The Organization ensure adequate resources for its statistical programme activities and play a greater advocacy role in mobilizing effective international support to strengthening national capacity in statistics, especially in areas of FAO priority concerns.
- FAO explore and undertake several measures to support countries in improving their statistical capacity in general and in producing, collating and reporting existing data in the best way possible.
- FAO establish a regular forum for institutionalized contacts with experts from member countries. It is recommended that an international advisory panel on statistics be created (complemented by an internal FAO body) to consider data needs and analytical approaches, improve responsiveness, gather intelligence about current data concerns and consolidate statistical methods. This is also a way of reaching statisticians beyond the ministries of agriculture.

III. Current statistical activities

4. In addition to ongoing activities outlined in the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2007,[2] FAO Statistics Division has initiated the following current statistical activities:

A. Modernization of FAOSTAT

5. FAOSTAT (FAO's corporate statistical database), which has been operational for the past decade, has many technical and functional limitations that have become apparent over recent years. The FAOSTAT2[3] proposal was developed to modernize

FAOSTAT, and that proposal has been approved by the FAO World Agriculture Information Centre Committee and now has full project status. Work is proceeding on data management and statistical methodology aspects, the technical architecture and systems requirements. FAOSTAT2 will:

- Provide an improved user interface, streamlined system processes, and a stable and reliable technical environment for the FAOSTAT working system.
- Improve the quality of data by providing robust tools for compiling, validating, estimating and analysing data, both at FAO headquarters and at the country level.
- Incorporate new user requirements for system functionality and access to new data sets.
- Improve user access to FAOSTAT data by enhancing and creating new mechanisms for data dissemination, including access to data across domains, and digital maps and codes to the second subnational level.
- Enhance data integrity by ensuring that appropriate methodologies and data standards are consistently applied.

6. FAOSTAT2 will be implemented using a phased approach. The project will be divided into three subprojects (working system, dissemination system and integrated corporate database). Work on these subprojects will proceed relatively independently of each other. Initial outputs of the project will focus on improvements to the current system and resolution of the most pressing problems.

B. Agricultural trade statistics matrix

7. The recent development by the FAO Statistics Division of analysis software that generates agricultural trade statistics matrices is a major advance for agricultural commodity trade analysis. The software queries the FAOSTAT database and produces matrices that allow the flows (imports and exports) of agricultural commodities between countries, regions or on a world basis to be mapped and summarized. In addition, it provides a key tool for improving data quality by allowing easy comparisons of mirror statistics with discrepancies and data gaps being easily identified. Access to the agricultural trade matrix programme for external users should be available in the first quarter of 2003.

C. Undernutrition

8. In June 2002, the FAO Statistics Division held a scientific symposium on the measurement of food deprivation and undernutrition. The symposium served to review the current status of widely used methods for measuring the referred dimensions. By promoting an open dialogue, it contributed to create a greater appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the different methods and of how the corresponding measures complement each other.

9. The Division's technical assistance programme on derivation of food consumption statistics from household income and expenditure surveys has increased its activities, mainly through regional training and capacity-building. In

addition, the programme has been expanded to produce estimates of food deprivation at the national and subnational levels.

D. Millennium development goals

10. The FAO Statistics Division has initiated the preparation of the FAO contribution to the United Nations Statistics Division monitoring report on progress towards the millennium development goals. FAO is responsible for two specific indicators: prevalence of undernourishment (millennium development goal 1, target 2) and percentage of forest cover (millennium development goal 7, target 9). An inter-agency coordination mechanism has been established to provide a framework to facilitate the consistency of the methodological aspects of that exercise and the integration of the different contributions into a consolidated report.

E. Producer prices

11. After several years of interruption, the FAO Statistics Division has recommended work on agricultural producer prices. The new exercise has introduced changes to the questionnaire design, and content and data collection has begun, mainly through questionnaires sent to countries. Since data for European Union countries are available through the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) it has been agreed, first through the Intersecretariat Working Group on Agricultural Statistics then bilaterally between FAO and Eurostat, that FAO will not send its questionnaires to those countries.

F. Cooperation and coordination in agricultural statistics

12. The FAO Statistics Division continues to take a leading role in regional consultations and meetings on agricultural statistics, including:

(a) The Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics;

(b) The African Commission on Agricultural Statistics;

(c) The FAO/Organization of American States Inter-American Statistical Conference/Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture Working Group on Agriculture and Livestock Statistics for the Latin America and the Caribbean Region;

(d) The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)/Eurostat/FAO/ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Meeting on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Europe.

13. Under the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS 21), a task team was established on rural and agricultural statistics. The task team[4] met on 16 and 17 September 2002, and decided to prepare and present a detailed action programme within the next six months to strengthen agricultural and rural statistics in Africa for poverty reduction and food security. FAO is the convenor of the task team.

14. FAO has been a member of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Agricultural Statistics, along with ECE, Eurostat and OECD, since its inception in 1991. The four organizations/agencies coordinate their agricultural statistical activities in Europe. They also organize joint seminars on emerging topics in the field. The most recent (eighth) seminar was held in Paris in November 2002, on the theme "Perspectives for agriculture and rural indicators and sustainability".

G. Agricultural censuses

15. FAO has been promoting the decennial Programme for the World Census of Agriculture. About 100 countries are expected to participate in the current Programme. Countries' census results are compiled and disseminated through the FAO web site and in hard copies. The next Programme will be issued in 2005.

IV. Future methodological development in agricultural statistics

16. Recent seminars on agricultural statistics have highlighted the need for methodological development in a number of areas relating to food and agricultural statistics. In particular, there is a need for the development of a framework for rural statistics, including new concepts and methods. The current classifications of urban and rural have become less relevant from an agricultural and rural policy perspective and need to be revised.

17. A broader view of agricultural statistics is needed as policy developments place greater demands on information relating to economic, social and environmental parameters for rural residents, incomes, businesses and resources in rural areas. Other areas where policy makers are requesting methodological development are crop-forecasting methods and agribusiness statistics. The Commission may wish to comment and make recommendations on these and other areas that it considers to be in need of methodological development.

Notes

[1] http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/MEETING/005/Y7016E/Y7016E00.HTM.

[2] See http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/MEETING/003/Y1522E.HTM.

[3] See FAO Statistics Division, *Modernization of FAOSTAT*, (http://www.fao.org/es/ESS/faostat1.htm).

[4] See http://www.paris21.org/htm/TT_agstats.htm#sept2002.

Annex

Medium-term Plan for the period 2004-2009

A. Statistics Division activities:

Programme 2.2.2: Food and Agricultural Information (abridged)

222A2 FAO/World Bank/USDA Initiative for Agricultural Statistics in Africa

388. Development problem to be addressed: the lack of a comprehensive and reliable statistical information base on the food and agricultural sector in Africa and the decreasing capacity of some countries to generate data is a major constraint to effective policies for food security and rural development in the continent. It also affects the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards development goals, including towards World Food Summit (WFS) commitments.

389. Proposed contribution to problem resolution: this joint effort by the World Bank, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and FAO is enhancing the availability of reliable and relevant statistical information on the rural sector in Africa, therefore, contributing to improved, evidence-based formulation of policies and programmes supporting the rural sector.

390. Intended end beneficiaries and benefits: the end beneficiaries of this entity are the rural population at large through more effective and efficient development programmes in the rural sector.

391. National governments, the private sector and development agencies take advantage of more integrated, reliable and timely statistical information on food and agriculture in Africa, to improve sectoral planning and enhance monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the agricultural sector.

Major Output(s):

a. Data needs assessment studies, development of conceptual framework and formulation of programme in target countries.

b. Data quality assessment, harmonization, storage and dissemination.

c. Provision of technical supervisory and evaluation services.

222A4 Systematic evaluation and improvement of statistical data quality

396. Development problem to be addressed: the reported decline in agricultural sector data completeness and quality undermines the global and national statistical knowledge base, which underpins sound decision-making. While the issue of data quality at the source will require a long-term and concerted effort at the country level, an urgent need exists for enhancing the quality in databases of FAOSTAT, which runs on obsolete software and hardware configurations, with the underlying programme libraries (components and compilers) no longer available for system support.

397. Proposed contribution to problem resolution: improvements in the quality and usefulness of FAO statistics by enhancing FAOSTAT functionality with the use of web-based technologies in collection, processing and dissemination of statistics. A

major improvement will be the availability of metadata on national methods of data collection and quality indicators.

398. Intended end beneficiaries and benefits: ultimate beneficiaries will be producers and consumers, benefiting from improved policy decisions based on more reliable, comprehensive and timely data.

399. The complete overhaul of FAO's statistical database with more reliable, methodologically-sound and transparent data and new aggregations and extrapolations functions, providing decision makers with improved data series, therefore, contributing to improved planning, evaluation and policy setting in countries.

Major Output(s)

a. Review and quality improvement of agricultural input statistics.

b. Review and quality improvement of agricultural production and trade statistics.

c. Improvement of quality and availability of agricultural census and survey data.

222P1 Agricultural Resources and Income Statistics

404. Development problem to be addressed: complete and accurate agricultural resources and income statistical data are essential to formulation, monitoring and evaluation of economically-sound agricultural policies and to supporting appropriate decision making.

405. Proposed contribution to problem resolution: the entity will ensure statistical data on population, labour force, prices, incomes and other socio-economic variables.

406. Intended end beneficiaries and benefits: people working in agriculture and the public at large are to benefit from agricultural policies taking economic and environmental factors into consideration.

407. To provide analysts and policy makers in governments and development agencies with: a set of up-to-date and world-wide statistical series and indicators relating to land use, population, labour force, agricultural inputs, prices, income, investment, resource flows and environmental issues, and statistical profiles with integrated presentation of key indicators of the agricultural sector.

Major Output(s)

a. Agricultural inputs, resources and environmental statistics.

b. Agricultural prices, income and investment statistics.

c. Statistical profiles for agricultural sector analysis.

222P2 Agricultural Production, Trade Statistics and Food Balance Sheets

408. Development problem to be addressed: complete and accurate statistical data regarding crop and livestock production, trade and utilization statistics need to be maintained so as to support economic analysis and forecasting, and the

development, implementation and evaluation of effective policies and programmes for food security and rural development.

409. Proposed contribution to problem resolution: this continuing programme activity complements the preceding in terms of FAO's core statistical work, covering the key areas of agricultural production and trade statistics and food balance sheets.

410. Intended end beneficiaries and benefits: ultimate beneficiaries will be producers and consumers benefiting from improved policy outcomes.

411. To provide users in FAO and the world community at large with a set of consistent and up-to-date series and indicators relating to production, trade and utilization — crop and livestock — statistics to analyse and monitor the food and agricultural regional and global situation and to support decision making.

Major Output(s)

a. Agricultural production statistics.

b. Agriculture trade statistics.

c. Supply Utilization Accounts and Food Balance Sheets.

222P3 Agricultural Statistics Development

412. Development problem to be addressed: the lack of timely, reliable and comprehensive agricultural censuses and surveys for the agricultural sector in many countries represents a critical constraint to policy making and development planning, as well as monitoring the performance of the sector and improving food security.

413. Proposed contribution to problem resolution: this continuing programme supports the development of methodologies and technical tools for agricultural censuses and contributes to the production by countries of harmonized and improved basic data, which will contribute to better planning, evaluation and policy setting in the agricultural sector.

414. Intended end beneficiaries and benefits: planners and administrators in the public and private sectors will benefit by having a better information base for decision making with the ultimate benefit flowing to society at large.

415. Improved availability, reliability, timeliness and usefulness of statistics relating to food and agriculture at the national level for improved sector planning, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes addressing food security issues.

Major Output(s)

a. Improved methodologies for agricultural censuses and surveys.

b. Strengthening of national capacities in agricultural statistics.

c. Data quality documentation.

B. Fisheries Division activities:

Programme 2.3.1: Fisheries Information

231A2 Development of Partnerships for the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) of the Fisheries Geographical Information System (FIGIS)

497. Development problem to be addressed: in the context of the globalization of issues related to governance and trade in natural resources, there is a deficit of reliable information. Comprehensive, objective and timely information and the resulting increased awareness would facilitate and stimulate more effective policy making, sectoral planning, management and, consequently, fishing practices.

498. Proposed contribution to problem resolution: direct involvement of, and improved coordination between information owners (national and regional centers of excellence) in the development and maintenance of an integrated worldwide information system is a guarantee of better quality information. The newly available information technology, together with the development of communication standards for information exchange, will facilitate the needed partnerships.

499. Intended end beneficiaries and benefits: the international community (producers, processors, traders, consumers, support industries and the public at large) are the ultimate beneficiaries. The intended benefits are effective policy making, sectoral planning and fisheries management which result in sustainable use of fishery resources.

500. Increased awareness of key fisheries issues and trends and their inter-relationship with other aspects of integrated natural resource management; better informed public debate in support of sustainable management of fisheries resources at the national and international levels, based on improved international fishery information standards and quality.

Major Output(s)

a. Enhanced FIGIS functionalities compatible with WAICENT, and modules and workflows for the integration and updating of data.

b. Coordination, technical and other support to the FIGIS/FIRMS Partnership and to information provider partners.

c. Comprehensive multi-disciplinary Geographical Information System (GIS)-based database on fisheries integrated in FIGIS.

231P1 Provision of Fisheries Information and Statistics

501. Development problem to be addressed: Members require current, comprehensive, and accurate fisheries information and statistics for policy making, sectoral planning and management, but often fisheries information is lacking, unreliable, incomplete or outdated. As a result, many fisheries policies and practices are not compatible with sustainable use.

502. Proposed contribution to problem resolution: the availability and use of comprehensive and standardized fishery information and statistics will facilitate more effective policy making, sectoral planning and management in support of

sustainable fisheries use, resulting in improved practices at national and international levels.

503. Intended end beneficiaries and benefits: increased and sustainable fishery production, utilization and livelihoods, sustainable ecosystems and protection of the environment will benefit key international stakeholders including producers, processors, traders, support industries and consumers as well as the public at large.

504. Availability of comprehensive, standardized global fisheries information and statistics and wide use by governments and other stakeholders to promote awareness of key fisheries issues and trends, as well as serve policy formulation in the sector.

Major Output(s)

a. Development of norms, standards, guidelines, arrangements and procedures for enhanced collection, storage, dissemination and sharing of fisheries information.

b. Fisheries information and library services.

c. Development and promotion of norms, standards, arrangements and procedures for enhanced collection, storage, processing, dissemination and sharing of fishery statistics.

d. Collation, analysis and dissemination of global and regional fishery statistics.

231S1 Advice and Technical Support to Member Nations and Regional Fisheries Bodies

505. This entity covers services to countries in respect of fisheries information and statistical development.

C. Forestry Division activities:

Programme 2.4.4: Forestry Information and Liaison

244P1 Forestry Information

654. Development problem to be addressed: a lack of transparency, clarity and comparability in forestry information, coupled with the extensive geographic spread of forests and their diverse characteristics, makes it quite challenging to have a clear picture of how resources are changing over time, constraining attempts to reform plans, policies and programmes to advance sustainable management of forests. As a result, well-intended policy reform cannot be monitored for effectiveness, while illegal activities and misuse of forest resources result in forest degradation or disappearance.

655. Proposed contribution to problem resolution: improved awareness of key forestry issues and advocacy of sustainable management of forest resources by policy makers and other important sectoral stakeholders, will facilitate reform and refinement of national forest policies and programmes.

656. Intended end beneficiaries and benefits: more successful reform efforts will advance sustainable management of forests, stem resource degradation and misuse,

as well as illegal activities in the sector, benefiting national governments and both current and future generations.

657. Improved awareness of key forestry issues, advocacy of sustainable management of forest resources (on the part of policy-makers in formulating forest sector plans and of researchers and academic institutions in informing the public debate) based on wider access to a current and objective information base.

Major Output(s)

a. Forestry Web site, providing access to databases and other information using dynamic search criteria.

b. Institution building services and methods for managing countries' forest-related data, information and knowledge.

c. Production of coordinated forestry information materials.

d. Documentation and search facilities and services, linked with specialized documentation centers.

e. Advocacy activities for non-technical audiences on selected forestry issues.